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## House Committee on Human Services

### Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities Written Comments on Interim Charge *Impacts of COVID-19 on Long-Term Care Facilities* September 25, 2020

*Impacts of COVID-19 on Long-Term Care Facilities: Consider the following issues in light of the COVID-19 pandemic:*

*1) Review the state's response to the pandemic, specifically as it relates to emergency regulations that prohibited visitation of residents of long-term care facilities by family members. Examine the physical and mental health impacts of the visitation policy on long-term care residents.*

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the Committee's Interim Charges. My name is Scott Daigle, and I am the Public Policy Director with the Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities (TCDD). Established by state and federal law, TCDD is governed by 27 Governor-appointed board members, 60 percent of whom are individuals with developmental disabilities (DD) or family members of individuals with disabilities. The Council's purpose in law is to encourage policy change so that people with disabilities have opportunities to be fully included in their communities and exercise control over their own lives.

One of our TCDD Council Members, Paul Cardarella, is the parent of an individual currently residing in one of Texas' State Supported Living Centers. The lengthy separation that has been imposed due to COVID-19 visitation restrictions has been very difficult for his family. To give the Committee a better understanding of the restrictions' impacts and how they have been perceived by an affected family, I offer you the following remarks from Mr. Cardarella:

Generally speaking, the state did a good job of taking a potential tragic situation and bringing resources to bear that got the situation under control

and probably saved lives. It, however, has now been 5.5 months and we are still restricted from visitation. The state made arrangements for FaceTime calls every other day, and that has certainly eased the pain of not being able to physically see our loved ones. However, the length of time has now surpassed what is mentally acceptable in my opinion. Our daughter is non-verbal, so she can't express herself in words. For a good while we were encouraged because she seemed happy whenever we visited with her, but in the last three weeks she does not seem happy and has cried more than once when we have to say goodbye. That is her telling us this has gone on long enough.

Everyday there are people from outside the campus coming in bringing supplies, food, etc., for the residents. They are screened, of course, but so could be parents and loved ones. The caregivers would be much more careful to not come if there was a problem, and they would be screened when they got there, as well. With the 5-minute testing procedure we could be assured there was not a problem. It just seems to us that our issue may have been overlooked because perhaps there are other "more pressing" issues. It is time to put this issue on the front burner because the State, which appropriately shut the campuses down at the appropriate time has now become guilty of overreach, no matter the reason. The local SSLCs have already developed a plan that allows for safe visitation, but the decision to implement is out of their hands. In my opinion, further delay in allowing the disabled community to have access to their loved ones has become inhumane and needs to be corrected now.

Thank you again for your time. Please do not hesitate to contact TCDD with any questions, or if we can provide any additional assistance.

**Scott Daigle**

Public Policy Director

Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities